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House Votes Against Debt Ceiling Increase

On January 19th in a largely symbolic action, the House voted in favor of H. J. Res. 98, a resolution to disapprove of the President's exercise of authority to raise the nation's borrowing power (or debt limit) by a vote of 239-176. The vote occurred in response to a January 12th letter from the President to Congress requesting an additional \$1.2 trillion in borrowing authority. Under the August-passed *Budget Control Act of 2011*, both Chambers of Congress may vote to block this scheduled increase in the debt ceiling. However, each Chamber would have to pass the resolution by a veto-proof 2/3 majority in order to be successful. While it is likely that the Senate will vote on this issue next week, it is unlikely that the measure will succeed, and the debt ceiling will be increased.

ADMINISTRATION UPDATES

Administration Releases State Exchange Progress Report

Twenty-eight States are on their way toward establishing a key component of health care reform—Affordable Insurance Exchanges—according to a report issued on January 18th by the White House.

Affordable Insurance Exchanges are State-based, one-stop marketplaces where consumers can choose a private qualified health insurance plan that fits their health needs. Beginning in 2014, Exchanges will offer consumers the same kinds of insurance choices that members of Congress have.

The report highlights how some States are moving forward to build Affordable Insurance Exchanges. The States profiled are not necessarily the States most advanced in establishing an Exchange; instead, they illustrate the diversity of approaches and progress being made.

To read the report, click [here](#).

CDC to Host Tribal Consultation

On February 2nd, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will host a Tribal consultation session in Atlanta, GA. The consultation session will be attended by senior leadership from the CDC Office of the Director as well as other CDC offices. Topics for discussion will include: the National HIV/AIDS Strategy; a summary of the National Center for

Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's reorganization and efforts to promote engagement among tribes, states and local agencies; and the agency's Traditional Foods and Sustainable Ecological Approaches to Promote Health and Prevent Type 2 Diabetes in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities. Additional opportunities will be provided during the consultation session for tribal testimony. Tribal leaders are encouraged to submit written testimony by midnight on January 26th. Testimony can be submitted to:

klw6@cdc.gov

ACF to Host Consultations on Tribal Priorities, Child Welfare Information Systems

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has announced two upcoming opportunities for Tribal consultation:

On March 5-6, the ACF will consult Tribes on ACF programs and Tribal priorities. These programs include: Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Child Development Block Grant, Child Welfare Services, etc. The consultation will take place at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, DC and will also feature an opportunity to learn more about ACF programs. Testimonies may be submitted no later than February 24, 2012, to: Lillian Sparks, Commissioner, Administration for Native Americans, 370 L'Enfant Promenade SW., Washington, DC 20447 or anacommissioner@acf.hhs.gov.

For more information, click [here](#)

ACF has also initiated consultation on the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). ACF seeks to analyze the impact of the State-centric SACWIS rules on Tribes and Tribal child welfare agencies, to determine if Tribes have sufficient flexibility and latitude to build information systems that will meet their business needs. ACF has scheduled two meetings via teleconferences to reach a broad audience of interested parties. The teleconference on February 15, 2012, is intended for consultation with Tribal leaders; the teleconference on

February 16, 2012, is intended to engage in consultation with their representatives.

DATES: The meeting dates and times for teleconferences are:

- February 15, from 1–3 p.m. EST.
Call in: (888) 989–8183
Password: 368–9268
- February 16, from 3–5 p.m. EST.
Call in: (888) 673–9785
Password: 621–8061

Written comments on this topic are due April 6 and can be submitted via the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:*
<http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- *Email:* DSSComments@acf.hhs.gov. Please include “Comments on Tribal Consultation” in the subject line of the message.
- *Mail or Courier Delivery:*
Terry Watt, Director, Division of State Systems, Children’s Bureau,
Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, 1250 Maryland Avenue SW., 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20024.

For more information on the SACWIS Consultation, click [here](#).

USDA Seeks Comments on FDPIR Proposed Rule

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has issued a proposed rule concerning new regulations for its Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). The changes are intended to simplify and improve the administration of and expand access to FDPIR, and promote conformity with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps). Comments are due by April 10th and can be submitted via the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to

<http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Enter Keyword or ID field insert “FNS–2011–0036”, and then click on Search. Click on Submit a Comment.

- Fax: Submit comments by facsimile transmission to (703) 305–2782.
- Disk or CD–ROM: Submit comments on disk to Laura Castro, Director, Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 504, Alexandria, Virginia 22302–1594.
- Mail: Send comments to Laura Castro at the above address.
- Hand Delivery or Courier: Deliver comments to the above address.

For more information, click [here](#).

Reminder: February 1st Deadline to Notify OPM of Intent to Enroll in FEHB

In a “Dear Tribal Leader Letter” dated December 21st, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) provided an update on Tribal access to the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. Under the permanent reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA), Tribes and Tribal organizations operating programs under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act are eligible to purchase health insurance for their employees under the FEHB Program.

Tribal employers may begin to enroll employees starting on March 22, 2012 with an effective coverage date of May 1, 2012. **All Tribes, Tribal organizations, and Urban Indian organizations wishing to participate in the FEHB program must notify OPM by February 1, 2012** via email at: tribalprograms@opm.gov or via phone at: 202-606-2530.

For more information, including the “Dear Tribal Leader Letter” and 2012 FEHB plans, click [here](#).

Reminder: January 31st Deadline to Comment on HHS Essential Health Benefits Bulletin

The Department of Health and Human Services recently released a bulletin outlining proposed policies that will give states more flexibility and freedom to implement the Affordable Care Act.

The Affordable Care Act ensures all Americans have access to quality, affordable health insurance. To achieve this goal, the law ensures that health insurance plans offered in the individual and small group markets, both inside and outside of the Affordable Insurance Exchanges (Exchanges), offer a comprehensive package of items and services, known as “essential health benefits.”

The bulletin describes an inclusive, affordable and flexible proposal and informs stakeholders about the approach that HHS intends to pursue in rulemaking to define essential health benefits. HHS is releasing this intended approach to give consumers, states, employers and insurers timely information as they work toward establishing Exchanges and making decisions for 2014. This approach was developed with significant input from the public, as well as reports from the Department of Labor, the Institute of Medicine, and research conducted by HHS

The bulletin addresses only the services and items covered by a health plan, not the cost sharing, such as deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance. The cost-sharing features will be addressed in future bulletins and cost-sharing rules will determine the actuarial value of the plan.

NIHB has submitted American Indian and Alaska Native-specific comments on this bulletin. To view NIHB’s comments, click [here](#).

Public input on this proposal is encouraged. **Comments are due by Jan 31st** and can be sent to: EssentialHealthBenefits@cms.hhs.gov.

For the essential health benefits bulletin, visit:
<http://cciio.cms.gov/resources/regulations/index.html#hie>

For a fact sheet on the essential health benefits bulletin, visit:
<http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/2011/12/essential-health-benefits12162011a.html>

Sign Up for Washington Report, at:

http://www.nihb.org/legislative/washington_report.php

For More Information Contact:

Jennifer Cooper, JD, Legislative Director
jcooper@nihb.org or

Liz Malerba, Legislative Assistant
lmalerba@nihb.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

NIHB EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

DATE: JANUARY 23RD AND 24TH

LOCATION: PHOENIX PARK HOTEL
 WASHINGTON, DC

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

DATE: JANUARY 24TH

TIME: 9:00 PM EST

NATIONAL BUDGET FORMULATION WORKGROUP MEETING

DATE: JANUARY 25TH – 27TH

LOCATION: DOUBLETREE HOTEL
 CRYSTAL CITY, VA

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT ELIZABETH.FOWLER@NIHB.ORG OR CALL (301) 443-1270.

STATE OF TRIBAL NATIONS ADDRESS

DATE: JANUARY 26TH

TIME: 10:30 AM

LOCATION: NEWSEUM
 WASHINGTON, DC

WATCH ON THE WEB: [HTTP://NCA.ORG/](http://NCA.ORG/)